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Sudan's "Arab" Revolution

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SUDAN'S "ARAB" REVOLUTION

On 25 May 1969, a small, obscure group of middle-grade army officers overthrew Sudan's elected government. It installed a military regime, ruled by a ten-man Revolutionary Council (all but one member is military), and a largely civilian shadow cabinet to administer the daily affairs of government.

The group, led by Colonel Jafar Numayri (now a major general and president of the Revolutionary Council), claimed it acted to free the country of the waste, corruption, and venality of its ineffective parliamentary predecessor. Despairing of the politicians' failure to deal effectively with the country's urgent economic, political, and social problems, the new regime was swift to suspend the provisional constitution and commit itself to major "socialistic" economic reforms, the elimination of political parties, support for movements of "national liberation," and firm adherence to the Arab cause in the dispute with Israel.

It is difficult to gauge the popular view of the new government, but initial reactions seem to reflect at least relief at being rid of some of the old, often corrupt, and more often incompetent members of the political establishment. At any rate, no effective opposition has materialized, although resistance activity has been reported from several disparate groups.

THE REGIME'S POLITICAL COLORATION

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25X1 Six of the ten council members, including Numayri, are said to be sympathetic to Communist aims. Fifteen of the 23-member cabinet allegedly are similarly inclined, and six cabinet officers are members of the Sudan Communist Party (SCP) central committee. A number of others, including Prime Minister Awadallah, are self-proclaimed socialists closely identified with Egypt, and some reportedly have even served as Egyptian intelligence agents.

The regime has taken pains to describe itself as democratic, socialist, and nonaligned, emphasizing the "Sudanese" aspirations of the revolution. The trend in the economic sphere, as is the case in many of the lesser developed nations, has been toward a more socialistic orientation. Thus, the policies expressed during the first three months of the new regime have probably not been greatly influenced by the Communists in the government. The presence of Communists at top levels, however, presents the SCP, the best organized political group in the country and the leading

Revolutionary Council President Jafar Muhammad Numayri

Prime Minister Babikar Awadallah

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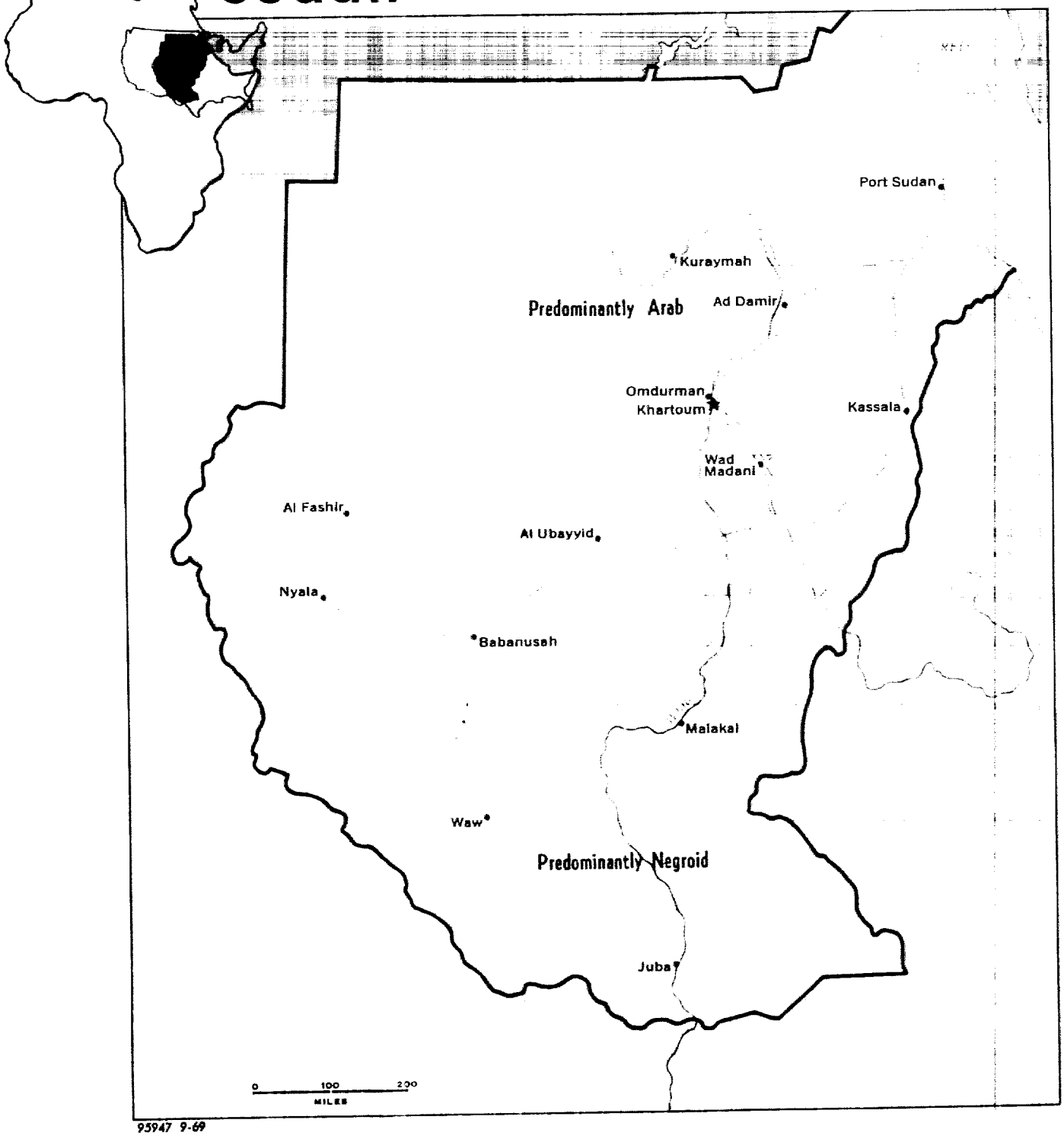
Sudan



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Communist party in Africa, with a good opportunity to assume real control. At the same time, it seems likely that the nationalist elements in the regime would resist any quick shift from the country's traditionally more conservative institutions.

PROMISES AND PERFORMANCES ON INHERITED DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

The new government, regardless of its political orientation, has assumed seemingly insurmountable burdens. The former government had survived in a sort of hand-to-mouth fashion that avoided the necessity to make major decisions. It was formed out of expediency from a coalition of the major political groups, and potentially disturbing issues were avoided whenever possible.

The military regime has eliminated all political activity and has called on the Sudanese people to unite behind it in the process of developing a "modern" and "socialist" Sudanese state. This will be a formidable task. The Sudan's political institutions have never advanced beyond a rudimentary stage and continue to be dominated by a primitive, tribal outlook, reflecting the wide range of special interests among the populace.

The ethnic and religious diversity of the country's 14 million people is most strongly reflected in the almost total disaffection of at least one segment of the country. Since the mid-1950s, a virtual state of civil war has existed in the southern provinces, where security forces are hard pressed to contain the insurgent activity of the largely Negroid rebels. This basically pagan but partially Christianized portion of the populace abhors the radical Arabism of the north and the military orientation of those in power in Khartoum.

One of the regime's first moves was to assure the south that it could look forward to some semblance of autonomy from Khartoum provided that it developed a broad, socialist-oriented movement consonant with the revolutionary regime in the north. Such a task is almost impossible on a short-term basis. The fighting continues unabated in the south, and neither the residents nor the government officials responsible for the area see any real prospects for solution.

Another problem, not unusual for emerging states, is a dearth of financial resources. With an annual per capita GNP of probably less than $100 and an inherited debt of over $400 million, the country lacks the funds to carry on day-to-day government operations. There is little money available to prosecute the extremely expensive war in the south or to embark on country-wide developmental projects. Pleas for aid and assistance from the USSR and Eastern Europe will take some time to bear fruit even if implemented. Moreover, this would represent a sharp shift in the direction of the flow of funds from aid and trade. Trade with non-Communist countries accounts for 79 percent of Sudan's exports and 76 percent of its imports (although the share to and from the Communist countries has increased about 60 percent since 1965), and developmental projects are largely dependent on Western funds. The US contributed about $107 million in aid ($69 million of this was in grants) between 1956 and 1967. US aid was severed after the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967.

The regime has made much of Soviet and Eastern European moves for closer economic and trade cooperation. It has, in fact, overstated the extent of new agreements in order to underline the shift away from economic dependence on the "imperialist" West, a move on which it apparently

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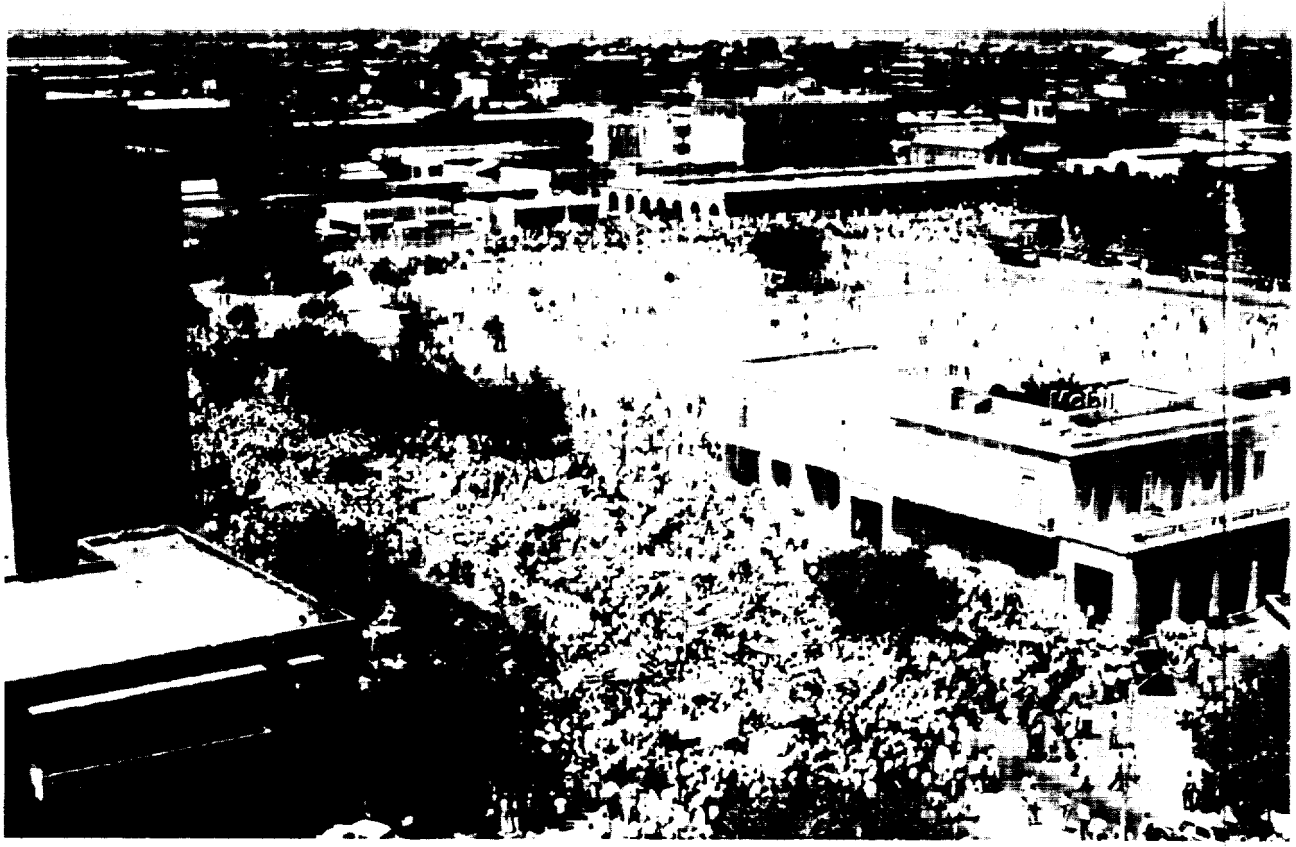
Postcoup, proregime demonstration in downtown Khartoum



prides itself. New agreements are being negotiated with Hungary and East Germany and a 1967 agreement with Bulgaria may be reactivated. These negotiations were initially played up as "aid" commitments toward "100 new development projects." Widespread Sudanese skepticism and East European denials, however, forced the government to retract its early description and announce that the discussions were dealing with trade and credit arrangements. The almost certain failure of any quick jump toward "better times" will contribute to a lessening of popular enthusiasm for the regime.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

In its foreign relations, the regime seems to show the increased influence of leftists if not Communists in high places. In one of its first official acts, the new government recognized East Germany, North Korea, and the South Vietnam Provisional Revolutionary Government. It discussed trade and aid agreements with East European delegations

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As if to reassure its neighbors, however, the government also dispatched "enlightenment" teams to its African and Middle Eastern neighbors in search of support.

Another aspect of the swing toward Moscow is the regime's allegation that the US and West Germany have been guilty of attempts at subversion. Prime Minister Awadalla chose the occasion of a visit to Cairo to give extensive airing to these accusations. He thereby got greater mileage out of the affair than if it had only been broadcast to a domestic audience, a large number of whom apparently doubt the regime's charges against the US. In any event, the US mission was forced to reduce its embassy staff from nine to four, further lessening the already meager Western presence that had been maintained since the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967.

Even with this observable trend, however, there remain undertones suggesting that some of the government hierarchy realize that Western support, particularly financial, is still necessary. Thus, requests for aid from Western and other international financial institutions can be expected.

OPPOSITION AND ITS POTENTIAL

After three months, opposition to the regime's control in Khartoum is virtually nil. The old political elements were surprised by the swiftness of the coup, and most leaders were arrested and jailed; eventually, many will probably be tried for activity alien to the revolution.

The Ansar, a Muslim religious sect comprising two million followers of Imam al-Hadi al-Mahdi, probably represent the greatest popular threat to the regime. They and their political arm, the Umma Party, are still in disarray, however, and would seem to have little chance for mounting any effective counterrevolutionary activity in the near future. Nevertheless, they are plotting on their island stronghold south of Khartoum and, with others also interested in opposing the regime, could in time put together an effective opposition force. Potentially in their favor is the fact that 40 percent of the officers and men in the armed forces are Ansar. If army service has not diluted the Ansar's tribal allegiance, they could be a source of trouble for the regime in maintaining military control, now the basis of its power.

Ansar tribesmen

Soldiers and civilians cheering coup

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The army itself probably will be the biggest threat to the regime. The coup leaders purged all of the "establishment" general officers and now appear to have firm control of the situation in the Khartoum area. Sudan is a large country, however, and its limited military forces are widely dispersed, a factor favoring counterrevolutionary activity. Thus, quiet but effective antigovernment plotting similar to that preceding the coup in May is certainly a possibility.

PROSPECTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The prospects seem fairly good that this government, in spite of conflicting loyalties at the highest levels, will survive for the foreseeable future, primarily because no opposition force now seems capable of ousting it. Given the nature and extent of the country's problems, however, the regime's ability to achieve "middle age" is more questionable.

In any case, the chances for the emergence of constitutionalism seem slight. Patterns of repression are already apparent in the arrest and jailing of those engaging in—and probably of some who are just suspected of—opposition to the government. Such repression may tend to coalesce the forces of opposition (the Ansar, other religious sects, the rebel southerners) into some kind of united front. Conflicting religious, political, and social patterns, along with disorganization and lack of material assets, however, will probably prevent any such unification without extensive external assistance.

Thus, although the prospects of real success for the present revolution may not be good, the future of parliamentary government in Sudan seems just as bleak. There is a good possibility that a radical Arab socialist state, anti-"imperialist" and pro-Soviet, will emerge. A basically totalitarian regime similar to those in other radical Arab states would bode ill for the stability of political life in Sudan and for closer Sudanese-Western relations.

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